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President: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Statement on the occasion of the tenth Africa Industrialization Day

The President: I should like to remind the General Assembly that tomorrow, 20 November, is the tenth Africa Industrialization Day.

Within the framework of the Second Industrial Development Decade for Africa, from 1993 to 2002, the General Assembly proclaimed 20 November Africa Industrialization Day. I wish to say a few words to mark the occasion, which offers a unique opportunity to reflect on the progress of industry in a continent of vast untapped potentials.

At the onset of the first Industrial Development Decade for Africa (1980-1989), industry in Africa was in a precarious state, with very little flow of foreign direct investments to this sector. Today, after years of decline in manufacturing output, basic industries are slowly being revitalized and there has been an upsurge in industrial production in many countries of the subregions of Africa.

With the globalization of economic activities, Africa faces a number of challenges. The continent is yet to adequately define workable policies and structures to meet the demands of the changing global business environment. At the same time, there are opportunities for African countries to establish meaningful alliances with other countries in Europe, Asia and the Americas. For example, the United States trade and investment initiative for Africa could contribute significantly to transforming the agro-based industrial sector in Africa, thereby creating avenues for income generation and, invariably, poverty eradication.

Whereas, in the 1960s the critical factor inputs for industrialization in Africa were capital and skilled labour, today, as we approach the new millennium, one of the major challenges to the African countries is access to technology — in particular information technology — to impact on policy development, determine products for markets and improve industrial competitiveness.

For Africa to become a competitive partner in the global economy, concrete steps need to be taken to transform the continent's enormous natural resources into manufactured products that will satisfy the basic needs of its peoples. In this regard, African countries, with the support of the development partners and the multilateral agencies, should redouble their efforts in developing small and medium-sized enterprises throughout the continent.

In recent years, there has been much emphasis on good governance, including macroeconomic management. However, good governance and macroeconomic management per se will not transform the industrial landscape of Africa, nor will they put in place the fundamental prerequisites for partnership in a globalized society.

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The role of the private sector in economic development, particularly industrial development, is widely acknowledged as a critical factor. Many African economies are slowly being transformed from public-sector-driven economies into a private-sector-led reconstruction and development. But the private sector needs the support of Governments in terms of ensuring that the enabling environment in which they operate is conducive to productivity and growth. In addition, Governments should support research and development aimed at adding value to natural resources, especially agricultural raw materials.

The private sector is expected to play a lead role in Africa's industrialization. Yet in most cases it is extremely weak, has limited access to finance and technology, is unaccustomed to global business management and for a number of exogenous factors has not quite succeeded in establishing strategic alliances with the business community in Europe, Asia and the Americas. Nevertheless, this sector's role in Africa's industrialization has to be sustained. Governments and the international community have taken many initiatives at the country level to strengthen the capacities and the resource base of the private sector so that it can effectively participate in the industrial development process of the continent. I would like to commend African countries and their international cooperating partners for the new thrust that has been given to private sector development in the continent through smart partnership, for a win-win outcome.

The theme that has been chosen to herald the millennium, in my view, succinctly summarizes the efforts of African countries throughout this century and gives a meaningful assessment of the priority needs of Africa, as well as full recognition of where its competitive advantages lie. The theme "From farm to factory for a better future" embodies my firm belief that Africa, with its endowment of diverse agricultural resources, most of which are industrial raw materials that could be transformed to provide adequate food for the peoples of Africa, could simultaneously improve agricultural productivity, as well as increase utilization of its manufacturing capacity for food security.

In this connection, the organizations of the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Food and Agriculture Organization, must work closely together in helping Africa to successfully produce agricultural raw materials on a sustainable basis. They should also assist African countries in effectively and efficiently processing such raw materials at the national and subregional levels in order to ensure a stable source of income for the majority of the farming communities in Africa and to provide employment for both the rural and urban populations at the factory level.

It now remains for me to once again bring to the attention of the international community Africa's efforts, its problems and constraints and the challenges the continent faces in an increasingly globalized society, including in particular the challenge of African debt cancellation. I am confident that the international community will step up its support to Africa in the coming millennium and that Governments and the private sector in Africa will succeed in building a better future for its peoples.

In concluding, let me remind all delegations of resolution 53/92, of 7 December 1998, requesting the President, in the preparation of the agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, to establish an open-ended ad hoc working group to monitor the implementation of that resolution, and in particular the recommendations of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. To this end, I have started consultations concerning the implementation of that resolution.

Agenda item 35 (*continued*)

Assistance in mine action

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/445)

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines): There was a time when my country was considered by the United Nations a mine-affected country. But realizing the overwhelming humanitarian imperative against the use of landmines rather early on, the Philippines abandoned their use.

This was a conscious decision, based on humanitarian considerations and even before global attention was focused on the landmine problem. This decision was part of my Government's integrated approach in addressing the problem of armed groups, an approach that does not rely entirely on military solutions, but focuses more on the fundamental social and economic problems that fuel illegal armed groups. Today the Philippines is no longer categorized by the United Nations as a mine-affected area.

Agriculture has been and remains an important part of the lives of our people, our economy and our national survival. In the longer term, the presence of landmines or the fear that landmines might still be present would have ensured that many agricultural lands would remain untilled and unused, depriving the farmer and his community of livelihood and economic development.

Having taken to heart that renouncing the use of landmines is a humanitarian imperative, the Philippines was determined to see the Ottawa Convention through. We actively participated in the Ottawa process, and we have signed the Convention and welcome its entry into force this year. We hope to deposit our instrument of ratification shortly. We are currently formulating draft legislation that would criminalize the manufacture, possession, sale or transshipment of landmines and components clearly intended to be used in landmines.

The Philippines has hosted several regional mine action meetings, several of which were conducted in cooperation with non-governmental organizations. The Philippines is also actively improving its mine action and clearance capacity, primarily with a view to taking a more active part in these activities in our region.

We joined others in Maputo to map out the implementation of the Convention, and we strongly support the action plan and inter-sessional meetings and processes related to the Ottawa Convention that were agreed upon in Maputo. I understand the concerns of the delegations that have opted not to give prominence to the Ottawa Convention in our draft resolution. But I hope that one day all of us will recognize the singular importance of this Convention in all our efforts in mine action and in eventually achieving the goal of zero victims.

The Philippines agrees completely with the Secretary-General, who states in his report that the role of non-governmental organizations has been indispensable in facing the challenges of mine action. Non-governmental organization participation is crucial, not only in mine clearance but also in mine awareness. This active role of non-governmental organizations must continue, and the Philippines hopes that at some point in the future, we can finally include consensus language in our resolution that will give due credit to the great work done in mine action by individuals and non-governmental organizations.

We join others in recognizing the importance of the central coordinating role of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian mine action worldwide. The United Nations is moving in the right direction by making sure that assessment missions and national surveys continue to be a key element in mine action activities. Making the development of an information management system a priority is also an important step, and in this regard, we would like to recognize the critical role played by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

The United Nations response to the mine problem has been swift and meaningful. One of the major challenges we recognized early on was the important transition of the United Nations Mine Action Service from a policy body to an implementation agency. This has been done, and done well. As a result, United Nations inter-agency coordination, cooperation and resource management have been optimized. We hope to see similar success when the United Nations Mine Action Service continues to work with its external partners.

We support the activities of the United Nations Mine Action Service, but we want to emphasize that mine action should not be done solely within the framework of peacekeeping; it should also be done in a broader humanitarian framework. However, we recognize that mine clearance has been an unavoidable part of peacekeeping activities, as it is important to make sure that our peacekeepers remain safe and able to carry out their mandate.

But mine action can, and does, often outlast peacekeeping activities, and we are happy to see that the transition in these cases has been successful and effective. We must also make sure that, despite the need for a global approach, mine action should be somewhat country-specific in the light of the diverse capabilities, dissimilar situations and environments of mine-affected States. This centralized coordination has resulted in bringing about a clearer picture of the current status of the landmine problem. Although much has been achieved, this picture shows that much remains to be done.

Technology has been an important factor in our efforts in addressing the mine problem. We have seen Governments and the private sector working hand-in-hand to come up with the necessary technology and equipment. We are encouraged by the fact that even the States that are not entirely with us in the Ottawa Convention are actively helping out, not only with financial and other resources but also by sharing advanced mine detection technology.

I only hope that as we develop the technology that could neutralize the deadly effect of landmines, hopefully rendering them useless, we will not witness any attempts to make landmines that can overcome this technology. Not only would this make the total eradication of landmines more difficult, but parties to conflicts might put even a higher premium on landmines as instruments of war. We must make sure that technology in this case will always be a blessing and not a curse.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report. It gives a clear idea of where we are now and the challenges that we need to overcome. I would also like to express our appreciation to the European Union and its individual member States for their crucial role in mine action. We join them in their firm commitment to mine action. The European Union, as well as other States, including Japan, have given much to ensure that global mine action remains a priority for all of us. The Voluntary Trust Fund remains viable because of them.

Finally, I would like to express our continued support for the countries that continue to be plagued by this difficult problem. Individual national actions have been strong and effective, even in difficult and crisis situations. We are all inspired and encouraged by the dedication and sacrifice of their leaders and people.

Mr. Türk (Slovenia): Slovenia associated itself with the statement made by the European Union on assistance in mine action. Additionally, we wish to contribute several specific points to the present discussion.

International mine action is one of the most important, most practical and most effective international projects of our time. It is firmly based on the principle of the prohibition of weapons which have excessively injurious or indiscriminate effects and the principles of protection of civilians in armed conflict. It is an indispensable component of the evolving concept of human security. It is legally defined in the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and in other relevant instruments of international law. It has given rise to a wide variety of practical activities aimed at an eventual total elimination of anti-personnel mines worldwide. These and other aspects of international mine action make it one of the most important priorities of the United Nations.

It is necessary to emphasize that the current assistance in mine action has given rise to a comprehensive understanding of the concept of mine action. That concept includes demining and destruction of landmines, rehabilitation of mine victims and the creation of mine awareness.

The implementation of provisions of international instruments regarding demining and destruction of landmines must be the first priority. This is necessary not only to thwart the recurrence of a conflict, but also to minimize the land area restricted by infestation and to expedite the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to both their zones and their livelihoods. Rehabilitation of mine victims is an important condition of normalization after a conflict and, perhaps most importantly, the way to restore both productivity and the human dignity of those most severely affected.

Mine awareness needs to be created and supported as a part of the effort to mobilize the population for post-conflict activities. Peace cannot be sustained, and development cannot thrive, in an atmosphere in which an explosion could wound any one at any time. Successful mine action — that is, action successful in all of the three main areas — strengthens both peace and development.

Slovenia is deeply committed to the objectives of international mine action and believes that the United Nations Member States can contribute to its success in a variety of practical ways. In this context, I wish to refer to a specific experience of Slovenia following the establishment of the International Trust Fund for Demining and Rehabilitation of Mine Victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Two years ago, the idea was developed in Slovenia to set up an organization which would, in the spirit of the Ottawa Convention and within the general foreign policy orientation of our country, offer assistance to the nearby countries in our neighbourhood. A large number of mines and other unexploded ordnance remained in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the end of the war, and they claimed victims every day. They prevented the population from returning to their homes and normal lives, as well as preventing refugees from going back to their homes. We therefore decided to set up the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victim Rehabilitation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through joint efforts and donations made by other United Nations Member States after the first donor conference in 1998, we have thus far managed to clear more than 2.5 million square metres of contaminated area in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to rehabilitate more than 200 mine victims.

The International Trust Fund has been successful in its endeavours to provide demining in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The operation undertaken within its framework has thus far this year demined about two thirds of the entire mine contaminated area in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In recent months, the Fund started activities in Kosovo and Croatia, which are included among the projects of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe.

The Fund's operations are action-oriented, with minimum administrative costs, which do not exceed 3 per cent of donations. Slovenia is grateful for the support of a large number of Member States to the Fund and would like to emphasize that their donations have helped in the most effective manner.

Every United Nations Member State can contribute to assistance in mine action. Many of the contributions are practical; others consist in political support and awareness-raising. All are important and need to be recognized as such by the General Assembly. Slovenia is actively participating in the process of finalizing the draft resolution under the present agenda item and looks forward to its adoption by consensus.

Ms. Ramírez (Argentina) *(spoke in Spanish):* Almost every day we read in the newspapers moving stories of children and adults, civilians and soldiers, who are randomly and senselessly victimized by anti-personnel mines, horrendous weapons that do not discriminate.

The signing of the Ottawa Convention signified a crucial step forward in efforts for safety and security, non-proliferation and disarmament. Argentina deposited its instrument of ratification on 14 September 1999.

The rapidity with which the Ottawa Convention obtained the number of ratifications necessary for its entry into force attests to the importance that much of the international community attaches to the principles and objectives enshrined in the Convention and its commitment to the goal of putting an end to suffering, death and destruction.

We must remember that even with the entry into force of the Convention, the task has not been completed and that it is important for those countries that have not yet done so to sign the Convention as soon as possible in order to facilitate coordinated and effective action by the international community to mitigate the consequences of the indiscriminate use of these weapons in various parts of the planet.

The total and complete prohibition of such weapons must go hand in hand with cooperation for mine clearance and assistance to the victims, who must receive special consideration. These are fundamental and complementary aspects that will alleviate their suffering and open the way for the development of affected countries.

The devastating impact upon populations and their livelihoods when useful land becomes unproductive, depriving millions of human beings of the ability to earn a living, is a problem whose social and economic dimension cannot be ignored.

My country's commitment is reflected in a practical way by its contribution to international cooperation for humanitarian demining, an activity to which we attach special importance. By way of example, we could mention the participation of Argentine military personnel in various demining programmes, the training, guidance and instruction given in Argentina to officers of other countries' armed forces and our participation in international forums.

The Argentine armed forces have been taking part in mine clearance programmes since 1993. That year, in the Republic of Nicaragua, in a programme implemented by the Organization of American States (OAS), through the Inter-American Defence Board, more than 5,000 mines were destroyed in the course of one year. In 1997 Argentina took part in the reopening of the project in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala under the auspices of the OAS Centre for the Promotion of Democracy.

Similarly, assistance in demining in Angola, the participation of a company of engineers of the Argentine army in the framework of the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) and the presence of Argentine military experts in Central America are some of the specific actions undertaken by Argentina.

In December 1993 the Government of Argentina made an offer to the United Kingdom to take charge of the removal of landmines emplaced in the Malvinas Islands by the Argentine armed forces during the 1982 conflict. The proposal was based on humanitarian considerations and was an act of goodwill intended to improve the well-being and quality of life of the

islanders. The offer was accepted by the British Government, and at present the Foreign Ministries of the two countries are exchanging ideas on the form of a possible bilateral understanding to conduct a feasibility study. Such a study is indispensable before any mine clearance work can take place.

Argentina provides highly qualified personnel for training people in demining, and we aim to increase our participation year by year. To this end, we have a centre which provides training and instruction in demining to Argentine and foreign military personnel, as well as mobile demining teams, which represent a further step in terms of education.

Argentina's conviction and determination with respect to international efforts to eradicate and prohibit mines throughout the world was evident even before the signature of the Ottawa Convention, through the establishment in 1995 of a moratorium on the export, sale or transfer of all anti-personnel mines without exception.

With respect to the humanitarian dimension of the problems caused by mines, we believe it appropriate to stress the contribution made by Argentina through what is called the "White Helmets" initiative. This institution brings together volunteers from various countries who are specialized in humanitarian assistance. They make themselves available to the international community, under the leadership of the United Nations, and can be called upon by affected countries or multilateral organizations.

Far from harming the security of States, the implementation of the Ottawa Convention may well constitute an important confidence-building measure between countries of the same region. This intent was expressed, even before the Oslo meeting, by the States members of the Rio Group, who pledged to respect the terms of the Convention since it benefits the countries of the Latin American region.

Within the framework of the OAS, the demining programme in Central America has shown itself to be an extremely important initiative not only because of its successes on the basis of concerted international cooperation, but also because of the goal of declaring the hemisphere a zone free of anti-personnel mines, in accordance with OAS resolutions. The Political Declaration of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), Bolivia and Chile as a zone of peace is also a key instrument for strengthening confidence and security in the region, and it commits signatory States to carry out efforts to that end.

The Ottawa Convention, by enshrining fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, attempts to increase common efforts aimed at assisting the victims of this scourge. Providing that assistance and removing mines constitute the great task of the years to come.

Mr. Hughes (New Zealand): First of all, I would like to join other speakers in thanking the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on this item, contained in document A/54/445.

In the year since the General Assembly last considered this matter, the Ottawa Convention has entered into force at an admirable pace. New Zealand signed the Convention on the first day it was open for signature and subsequently ratified it in January this year. We would urge those Member States that are yet to ratify the Convention to do so as soon as possible.

As part of its long-standing commitment, New Zealand continues to engage actively in mine action efforts. New Zealand Defence Force personnel have participated in demining operations in Afghanistan and Angola and continue to do so in Cambodia and Mozambique, as well as in the unexploded ordnance programme in Laos. Most recently they have been involved in the setting up the Kosovo Mine Action Coordination Centre. We continue to contribute financially to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action and the Laos and Cambodia trust funds. We remain keen to explore further ways of putting our proven expertise to good use.

The laying of new mines in Angola this year as hostilities resumed is particularly deplorable. New Zealand had a long-standing involvement in mine action efforts in Angola, and it was disheartening to see United Nations mine action efforts reduced and shut down after so much work.

On a more positive note, we greatly welcomed the outcomes of the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, held in Maputo in May this year, including the establishment of its inter-sessional work programme and the adoption of article 7 reporting formats. We are pleased that the formats enable countries to submit their reports electronically and welcome the decision of the Department for Disarmament Affairs to compile the reports into a database that is accessible on

the Internet. This is an important and cost-effective commitment to transparency and information sharing.

We also pay tribute to the hard work of the United Nations Mine Action Service over the past year, including its key role in the speedy establishment of the Kosovo Mine Action Coordination Centre.

Over the past year, the momentum behind the Ottawa process has continued. That momentum draws strength from the diversity of the advocates of the Ottawa process, be they Governments, non-governmental organizations, international organizations or the ordinary man or woman on the street. We were pleased to see that the first meeting of the inter-sessional standing committees of experts continued the Ottawa spirit of inclusivity and engagement.

The Ottawa process has encouraged us to maximize limited expertise and resources in mine action. Effective coordination and planning of all of mine action activities will be crucial if we are to meet the goals set out in the Convention. We cannot afford duplication of effort and wasted resources. New Zealand welcomes attempts made within the United Nations thus far to achieve this end. The establishment of a clear division of labour between the various United Nations entities and of coordinating mechanisms such as the Inter-Agency Coordination Group is to be applauded.

We are also particularly encouraged by the development of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and the United Nations Mine Action Service. Both IMSMA and the conduct of level-one surveys should greatly assist both mine affected States and mine action entities in setting their mine action priorities and national work plans. New Zealand encourages the development and use of these tools to achieve maximum effectiveness in mine action programmes.

Effective and transparent management processes are essential if donor confidence is to be maintained. It is unfortunate that earlier this year donor confidence in the Cambodia Mine Action Centre was shaken by allegations of fraud and mismanagement. As a long-standing donor to that Centre, we are pleased to see that the Cambodian Government, the Centre and the United Nations Development Programme have undertaken a programme of management and financial reform aimed at dealing with the problems and restoring donor confidence in the Centre. We understand that a final report on the full reform measures to be undertaken will be provided to donors later this month. While there is clearly a long way to go, New Zealand welcomes the progress that has been made and looks forward to CMAC providing a full and positive response to the management concerns that have been raised by donors.

Given the extent of the challenges facing countries with mined territories, mine action programmes must be sustainable. It is imperative that countries are encouraged to develop their own national programmes. The impressive achievements of the accelerated demining programme in Mozambique testify to the effectiveness of indigenized programmes. This has been a key aim of the involvement of New Zealand personnel in mine clearance.

Finally, we are pleased to co-sponsor the important draft resolution before us on this item.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): We long for a day when civilian life will be free from the threat of anti-personnel landmines. These haunting echoes of shots fired long ago and conflicts raging miles away have no place in civil society. They are a tragic outgrowth of war when they strike innocents, shattering civilian lives and tormenting families. And yet, in the shadow of tragedy, a glimmer of hope arises. People from various nations who clashed on the battlefields of yesterday are clearing the minefields of today. This indeed captures the most important theme of the effort against the devastation of anti-personnel landmines: cooperation. The report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action reaffirms the discovery that took hold barely 10 years ago that action by individual States alone can no longer quell the humanitarian threat posed by anti-personnel landmines.

It should be emphasized that landmines are creatures of context: they are born in an atmosphere of terror and threats, just as they are weakened in the context of cooperation and goodwill between States. Such cooperation provides impetus to the international community as a whole. I can point to several small examples from the perspective of my own battle-scarred country to illustrate this principle.

The Jordan Valley is still infested with anti-personnel landmines planted decades ago. Israel and Jordan, which forged a Treaty of Peace in 1994, have now launched a large-scale project to demine the Jordan Valley. The project covers all facets in the fight against anti-personnel landmines, from actually demining the landscape to warning the population at large and

rehabilitating the victims. On the heels of this combined effort, a broader cooperative venture was launched. Canada and Norway lent their resources and expertise to the Jordan Valley project as part of their overall efforts to reduce the effects of anti-personnel landmines. Now other nations have expressed interest in joining the Jordan Valley project. Cooperation, it seems, is contagious.

However, even the most thorough demining projects will not suffice, in our region or anywhere else in the world, unless they are accompanied by a parallel effort to educate the general population. As outlined in paragraph 19 of the Secretary-General's report, information-management techniques must be used to ensure that mine-affected communities can "coexist safely with a mine threat". To this end, Israel and other nations have taken an active role in the Mine Awareness Project launched by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Angola. Our volunteers and those of other nations have worked to educate the population, treat victims and set up a special database. For its part, Israel took steps to help meet the programme's financial needs. The coordinator of the UNICEF project, Mr. Hanoch Barlevi of Israel, reported that the Angola experience offered valuable lessons for other mine-affected areas.

It is clear that nothing captures more starkly the tragic consequences of anti-personnel landmines than the stories of the victims themselves. But perhaps one story, with which I will close, can offer a positive inspiration.

Ibrahim Waradat, 12 years old, grew up in the Ramatiya district on the Jordanian-Syrian border. He was badly injured several years ago when he happened upon a landmine that exploded; he lost an arm, several fingers of the other hand and his left eye. The shame of his injury left him unwilling to attend school. After Queen Noor met the boy at an international conference, Jordanian and Israeli authorities began working together to treat landmine victims like him. He was the first child to be admitted to the rehabilitation centre at Beit Levinstein in Raanana. Following many months of cooperation between the two nations and local doctors, and with the aid of artificial prosthetics, Ibrahim returned to Jordan, where he was greeted at a special ceremony attended by Prince Raed and Israel's representative in Amman. The boy is now back in school.

Let us hope that the cooperation that healed Ibrahim will likewise heal the world of the devastation caused by these devices and put an end to the hostilities that perpetuate them.

Mr. Sun (Cambodia): On behalf of the Cambodian delegation, allow me first of all to extend my gratitude and appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on "Assistance in Mine Action" (A/54/445), which addresses the continued problem of landmines. The report also provides us with the opportunity to assess the progress achieved so far by the mine-affected countries and by the world community in the process of their cooperation in the eradication of landmines.

Landmines still pose a serious threat to more than 60 countries worldwide. Nearly a third of the world's nations are to some extent contaminated by landmines and unexploded ordnance. Among the countries most severely affected are least developed countries that are struggling to provide their societies with even the most basic necessities.

Cambodia is among those countries whose people have suffered a great deal from landmines. Due to the legacy of more than two decades of conflict, landmines have already killed tens of thousands of people and maimed tens of thousands more. Landmine survivors — men, women and children — make up a part of the social landscape of today's Cambodia.

Since 1992, Cambodia has been waging a struggle against landmines. The first step taken by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), in cooperation with the then Supreme National Council of Cambodia (SNC), was to form the Cambodian Mine Action Centre in order to respond to the country's urgent need to embark on demining programmes and related activities, with initial support by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other donor countries and relevant international organizations.

Thanks to the constant and generous assistance of the world community, the Cambodian Mine Action Centre has been able to take steps towards reducing this immense problem. Recently it has benefited from the use of new technologies and improved demining methods and equipment. In the past few years the implementation of demining programmes has resulted in well-known achievements in related activities, in particular as concerns progress in operational activities in the minefields and in the Cambodian training programme, as well as in capacity-building at the country level and the launching of a mine-awareness campaign among the population.

At the recent meeting of the standing committees of experts of the Ottawa Convention, held in Geneva, Cambodia was recognized as a mine-affected country whose struggle against landmines has succeeded in reducing the rate of mine accidents considerably. With the ongoing operational activities in the minefields, this trend will continue. There are also indications that 23 per cent of the land thought to be mined throughout the country has been cleared.

Despite the improvements that have been made, however, the mine problem in Cambodia continues to be a major obstacle. It is believed that the number of mines that are still active in rural areas of Cambodia varies from 4 million to 6 million, not to mention unexploded ordnance from previous conflicts. In this respect, as peace prevails throughout the country, my Government has reiterated its commitment to devote greater efforts to demining. It reaffirms its continued strategy to address the mine problem in the years ahead as a priority in the overall framework of the programme of rehabilitation and development. In order to strengthen this effort, Cambodia has completed its legislation process on the relevant issues. The national law on the ban on landmines has already entered into force, after its promulgation by His Majesty the King in May this year.

In addition, on 22 May 1999, the Prime Minister issued a seven-point declaration relating to the immediate policy of the Royal Government to accelerate the process of demining in a more efficient and effective manner. It is noteworthy that in spite of its financial constraints, the Government has for the first time clearly earmarked its financial contribution in the national budget approved by the National Assembly for the current fiscal year.

It should also be noted that this year, the Cambodian Mine Action Centre has undertaken a programme of change in its leadership and vast reforms in its organizational structure, with the aim of improving its management and ensuring credibility and transparency. The process of reform is consistent with the policy of the Government to reflect the reality and necessity in the country as well as to meet international requirements. The role that the Centre has played so far in contributing to the achievement of this humanitarian objective should be appreciated.

My country has joined international efforts to strengthen cooperation in resolving the landmine problem. As one of the countries victims of landmines, Cambodia supports all initiatives leading to a total ban on the production, use, stockpiling, export and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction. It is in this spirit that Cambodia was one of the first countries to sign the Ottawa Convention in 1997. Furthermore, it acceded to the Convention in June this year, and thereby became one of the States parties to the Convention, which had already entered into force. We now realize that emphasis should be placed on the full and speedy implementation of the Ottawa Convention in the worldwide context.

Over the years, we have witnessed the efforts of the international community to resolve the worldwide humanitarian crisis caused by millions of landmines. On behalf of Cambodia, my delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the United Nations and its relevant bodies and agencies, the donor countries and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations for their generous assistance and support provided to my country to date in overcoming mine problems; we owe a debt of very deep gratitude for the actions of all of those donor countries. In this connection, and in the spirit of the Maputo Declaration and the Ottawa Convention, we also call for further resource mobilization for the Voluntary Trust Fund, aimed at enhancing assistance and cooperation to mine-affected countries throughout the world, in order to rid humanity of this scourge.

My delegation also wishes to emphasize the fact that, for a country like Cambodia, which is one of the least developed countries, as long as the mine problem is our main concern, continued financial and technical assistance will remain essential to our mine clearance efforts if we are to rid ourselves of this silent and indiscriminate killer.

Mr. Alemán (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me first of all to express the gratitude of my delegation for the important report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action, document A/54/445, which gives an account of the progress achieved with regard to assistance for mine clearance as well as the current situation of the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action. We also take note of the activities of the various agencies of the United Nations system and of other organizations and non-governmental organizations that are participating in this area. The report also highlights the challenges facing the international community in this field and the strategies required to overcome them. In this context, we encourage the United Nations Mine Action Service to develop its activities in other regions, especially in South America.

The entry into force of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction was an important event this year, as was the success of the First Meeting of the States Parties, held in Maputo, at which an inter-sessional working programme was set out and five informal standing committees of experts were established to facilitate the full implementation of the Convention.

My country, which participated in the Ottawa process with great interest, has responsibly shouldered its obligations as a party to this important Convention and has begun to implement it fully through the creation less than a month ago of a demining centre in Ecuador; I am very pleased to be able to announce that initiative here in this Hall. The purpose of that centre is to provide humanitarian assistance to victims, establish a better structure for demining activities, coordinate the work of the various groups in Ecuador that deal with the issue and to try to attract and make better use of international assistance.

Ecuador attaches the utmost importance to the Ottawa Convention, because we are convinced that it strengthens and improves upon the principles of international humanitarian law that are applicable to armed conflict, consolidates respect for disarmament conventions, especially those relating to controls on conventional arms that have especially harmful and indiscriminate effects, and, in particular, fosters and strengthens peace.

For Ecuador, the complete and definitive elimination of anti-personnel landmines is a priority objective, because we believe that the key goal of all demining processes is to consolidate peace among the countries affected. With this as its priority, Ecuador has been working at the domestic level for a year to ensure the successful implementation of the first phase of the demining programme, which was carried out by agreement of the Government of Peru. Here we must stress the timely and generous cooperation that we have received from various friendly Governments, such as Canada, Spain, the United States, Japan and others, to which we would once again like to express our profound gratitude.

My country has developed its human resource capacity so that, although numbers and equipment are limited, personnel are sufficiently trained to continue the demining programme effectively. However, my delegation would like to emphasize that international cooperation plays a major role in medium-term and long-term efforts to carry out all activities under the demining programme in the affected areas of our territory. During both of these stages attention must be paid to other essential factors, such as prevention and humanitarian assistance to victims.

My country is confident that, through the mechanisms of the Ottawa Convention, it will be possible to agree on ways of cooperating in this process in order to free the world from the scourge of mines by means of individual or joint contributions from Governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations that have the experience, technology and resources to deal with the problem of mines.

In order to tackle this problem seriously, it is indispensable to have mechanisms that will provide for education, coordination, carefully devised strategies, the universal application of the Ottawa Convention, the destruction of arsenals, encouragement and implementation of mine-related activities, financial assistance, technical cooperation and humanitarian care.

Finally, I should like to highlight and pay tribute to the work carried out by the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, as well as many other institutions whose efforts and dedication are proving to be very productive in the continuing campaign in favour of this lofty cause.

The President: In accordance with the decision taken by the Assembly yesterday at its 57th plenary meeting, I now call on the Observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Martino (Holy See): On 28 February 1999, the eve of the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, Pope John Paul II said:

> "Tomorrow, 1 March, the Convention which bans anti-personnel mines and orders their destruction will come into effect. For the entire community this is a goal which marks a victory of the culture of life over the culture of death. The Holy See has, right from the start, shown its adherence, signing and ratifying the Ottawa document of 4 December 1997.
>
> "For the world to be free from these terrible and treacherous weapons, the path is, unfortunately,

still long. I pray God to give everyone the courage of peace, so that the countries which have not yet signed this important instrument of international law might do so without delay, and that they might continue perseveringly in the work of getting rid of mines and of rehabilitating the wounded. May people walk together in the paths of life, without fearing the hidden dangers of destruction and death."

The first step that can and must be taken by all is to stop immediately any use of landmines. The adoption of the Convention and its rapid entry into force are indicative of the moral determination not only of States but also of the peoples of the world to eliminate these insidious weapons. It is therefore an unbelievable and inhuman paradox that mines are still being laid, even in places where they had already been cleared.

The Convention obliges States parties to clear the mines laid on their territories. Only then will the many people who live in mined areas be free to carry out the activities of their daily lives without fear of injury or death and without fear for the future of their children. Many of the most severely mine-affected countries will continue to need financial help for mine clearance for many years to come. If the very purpose of the Convention is to eliminate all landmines, mine clearance must remain a priority. This obviously includes the training of local personnel and the ongoing development of effective means for mine detection and clearance that are adapted to varying local situations.

Mine clearance is also an effective step towards the integral social and economic development of afflicted countries. This broader aspect cannot be overlooked. Consequently, funding for mine clearance must become and remain an integral part of the aid and development programmes of both donor and afflicted States. This requires long-term planning and commitment, keeping in mind that the lives of people and the future well-being of entire regions are at stake.

Assistance to mine victims is another essential step along the path to a peaceful world. The humanitarian orientation of the Convention must assure that this priority remains before the public conscience. Mine victims, far too many of whom are children, have very special long-term needs which must be met with a view to their full reinsertion into society and their own contribution to the common good. But mine victims are not alone. They are also part of a larger picture: the family and society. Countries that have been torn apart by conflict are unable alone to provide for the basic health-care needs of the affected.

Assistance given by donor countries for mine clearance and for mine victims is a concrete expression of the solidarity that is the very basis of peaceful international relations.

Many other questions remain open: the production, stockpiling and trafficking of landmines, as well as their destruction. As long as mines are produced and stockpiled there is a risk that they will be used. The problem of the illegal trade in landmines is a further threat.

The goal set out in the Convention cannot be realized until that instrument becomes universal. The will of the vast majority of States and of the peoples of the world is clear in this regard. It is urgent therefore to ask those States which have not yet acceded to or ratified the Convention to weigh carefully the consequences of their delay. The Holy See would equally urge progress within the Conference on Disarmament on measures to ban the transfer of landmines.

It is clear that the need to eliminate landmines cannot be cast merely in political terms. It is a moral question that affects almost every aspect of the lives of the afflicted countries, which are often among the poorer countries. Landmines are both the seeds and the fruit of war. They also set up barriers between peoples and between States. They set back the cause of development and affect the very lives and dignity of countless people.

The Holy See will continue to attach great importance to the total elimination of landmines and to the need for ongoing help for those who have been their victims. Landmines are small weapons, but they are capable of blocking the path to true peace and development for countless peoples.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. I should like to inform members that a draft resolution under agenda item 35 will be submitted at a later date.

Agenda item 20

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/619)

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/154 and Add.1)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.17/Rev.1)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/54/129/Rev.1, A/54/130/Rev.1, A/54/153, A/54/278, A/54/294, A/54/295, A/54/296, A/54/350, A/54/421, A/54/462, A/54/534)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.29)

(c) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/449)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.22)

(d) Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/217)

(e) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/134)

The President: I wish to inform members that sub-item (f) of agenda item 20, entitled "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan" will be considered together with agenda item 50 at a later date.

Regarding draft resolutions, the Assembly has to date: under sub-item (a), draft resolution A/54/L.17/Rev.1, entitled "Emergency response to disasters"; under sub-item (b), draft resolution A/54/L.29, entitled "International assistance to and cooperation with the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America"; and under sub-item (c), draft resolution A/54/L.22, entitled "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster".

Before proceeding further, I should like to inform members that, in a letter dated 6 October 1999 addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of October, requests that the General Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the Observer of Switzerland in the debate on agenda item 20. Taking into account the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear the Observer of Switzerland on this agenda item?

It was so decided.

I now give the floor to the representative of Greece to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.17/Rev.1.

Mr. Gounaris (Greece): It is an honour for me to take the floor in order to introduce to the plenary Assembly a humanitarian resolution entitled "Emergency response to disasters", submitted jointly by the Permanent Missions of Greece and Turkey under agenda item 20 (a).

The catastrophic earthquake that struck Turkey in August mobilized Greek authorities to rush rescue teams and aid units to areas of disaster in neighbouring Turkey, offering their contribution to saving human lives. Upon receiving the news of the strongly felt earthquake in the north of Athens one month later, Turkish authorities immediately dispatched specially trained rescue teams to the stricken areas. The immense need for emergency humanitarian assistance prompted similar, unified reactions in both countries.

The spontaneous acts of fraternity and solidarity between members of the Greek and Turkish rescue teams, sifting through the rubble of buildings destroyed by the earthquakes, motivated our two Ministers for Foreign Affairs to propose and offer to the world community an effective disaster response capability. The decision of the Turkish and Greek Governments, reflected in this draft resolution, to establish a joint Standby Disaster Response Unit comprising contingents drawn from governmental and non-governmental organizations and agencies of both countries in order to reinforce and expand existing arrangements of the United Nations system bears no financial implications for the programme budget of the United Nations. This joint Standby Disaster Response Unit is ready to offer its services under the auspices of the Secretary-General in any part of the world, whenever needed.

In this context, I would like to thank the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat as well as the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Vieira de Mello, for their support of this joint initiative aimed at enhancing existing modalities within the United Nations system.

This draft resolution has met with wide and unprecedented support from the United Nations community. This initiative has been widely welcomed as fully complying with and promoting the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Thanks to the support of all Permanent Missions, this is the first humanitarian draft resolution to be concluded and submitted this month for adoption by the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. To date, 103 Member States have become sponsors of draft resolution A/54/L.17/Rev.1., and I have been informed today that Belarus has also expressed a wish to co-sponsor the draft resolution.

On behalf of my Government, I would like to express our deepest appreciation and thanks to all the sponsors for their support.

On 13 October 1999, the United Nations observed the annual International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction, a culminating point of the 1999 World Disaster Reduction Campaign, which was a highlight of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The annual theme was "Prevention pays", with special emphasis on seismic risk reduction.

This year, as underlined in the relevant report of the Secretary-General, natural disasters of an unprecedented scale affected many parts of the world. Rapid urbanization, environmental degradation, climate change and the depletion of natural resources are among the factors contributing to the increased vulnerability of communities all over the world to natural disasters.

During 1999, Latin America, the Caribbean, Turkey, Greece, Mexico and Taiwan suffered the loss of thousands of human lives. Turkey, unfortunately, just a few days ago, was struck for a second time by an earthquake. Greek search-and-rescue workers, medical provisions and mobile medical units, responding to an urgent call from the Turkish authorities, were among the first to arrive — in Bolu, last Saturday — after a new, devastating earthquake hit our neighbouring country. The same day, immediately after the earthquake struck, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mr. Ismail Cem, spoke on the phone with his Greek counterpart, Mr. George Papandreou. I would like to take this opportunity to express once more Greece's deepest concern about and solidarity with the victims of the earthquake in Turkey.

I hope that this draft resolution, representing a modest contribution by Greece and Turkey to the United Nations efforts for natural disaster reduction, will be adopted today by consensus.

The President: I now call on the representative of Turkey, also to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.17/Rev.1.

Mr. Göktürk (Turkey): As we approach the end of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, it is tragic that there has been a dramatic increase in the number, effects and costs of natural calamities. Global figures tell us that disasters have claimed an increasing number of human lives and have cost the world an average of $87 billion each year during the last decade. The cost of disasters in the 1990s was nine times as high as in the 1960s.

The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction has helped put the issue of the prevention and mitigation of disasters on national and political agendas. Turkey itself and the world at large have learned much in recent years, generally the hard way, about disaster mitigation. One of the most important lessons we have learned from dealing with the
effects of recent earthquakes is that coordination between all actors is essential.

The Secretary-General, in his annual report on the work of the Organization, describes 1998 as the worst year on record for weather-related natural disasters. I presume 1999 will be recorded in the annals of history as a year distinctly characterized by a string of earthquakes along the fault lines of our globe — earthquakes almost unprecedented in their magnitude and frequency. My country, for one, within a three-month period sustained blow after blow because of the unstable crust on which it sits.

Impending disasters must be treated as the modern sword of Damocles, requiring us to be disaster-conscious, vigilant and ready to respond.

In the aftermath of the massive earthquake in Turkey last August, and the one that occurred a month later in Greece, the prompt mobilization of rescue teams and aid units by the two countries in each other's hour of need inspired the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Turkey and Greece — Mr. Cem and Mr. Papandreou — to offer the world community an effective disaster response capability. The Governments of Greece and Turkey have therefore decided to establish a Standby Disaster Response Unit, comprising contingents from governmental and non-governmental agencies of both countries, to reinforce and expand existing standby arrangements of the United Nations system. The draft resolution before the Assembly, entitled "Emergency response to disasters" is the result of this inspiration of the two nations.

We are grateful to the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions, and countries and other organizations that rushed to our aid. We therefore feel well placed to appreciate the importance of the United Nations disaster reduction capabilities. The United Nations must continue to offer both organizational and material support to Member States, given the fact that natural disasters keep claiming lives and destroying property in all corners of the world.

In this connection, I would also like to express our appreciation for having received overwhelming support for the Greek-Turkish draft resolution on cooperation in establishing a joint emergency response capability. The impressive number of sponsors testifies to this support. I am also pleased to announce at this point that the delegations of Israel and Georgia have also joined the list of sponsors.

We are convinced that the Assembly will adopt the draft resolution with the enthusiasm it deserves. Turkey, hand in hand with the international community, will continue to be actively involved in furthering the United Nations humanitarian causes.

Lastly, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Greece for the kind words he addressed to my nation.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Belarus to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.22.

Mr. Sychov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The depth and scope of the drastic consequences of the disaster that took place on 26 April 1986 at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant made Chernobyl a global problem. The numerous casualties, the considerable economic damage in the contaminated areas, which were as large as the territory of a medium-sized country, and the poorly studied and often unpredictable health effects of the radiation urgently called for international cooperation in addressing those consequences.

Unfortunately, the dynamics of the situation in the affected regions provides little ground for optimism. Although the most critical stage in the Chernobyl mitigation activities is already behind us, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine continue to have serious concerns about the enduring effects of radiation on people's lives and health.

I take this opportunity to cite several facts concerning Belarus. The rate of thyroid cancer among children and young people in the affected regions has risen 40- to 60-fold and, in individual population centres, even by a factor of 300. However, according to the assessments of medical experts, the highest rate of illness is yet to come.

In recent years, in the areas affected by radioactive contamination, there have been serious negative changes in the demographic situation that indicate a social and economic decline in many regions. This has necessitated the adoption of a range of appropriate measures, to the implementation of which our country annually allocates a significant share of the state budget. Currently, the allocation amounts to some 10 per cent of the gross domestic product.

In recent years, it has been possible to relocate people from the contaminated regions to safer areas, to conduct professional medical examination of victims and to ensure their treatment, including the treatment and improvement of the health of children and young people.

Valuable assistance has been rendered towards rehabilitating the agricultural and industrial infrastructure of the affected regions and towards ensuring radiation protection of the population locally and elsewhere.

However, our country cannot solve the entire range of post-Chernobyl problems on its own. Belarus's need for resources to overcome the consequences of the disaster significantly exceeds its financial and technological capacities.

Our country highly appreciates the United Nations catalyzing and coordinating role in the development of international cooperation on Chernobyl. We are grateful to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for the preparation of the upgraded 1999 United Nations Appeal for International Cooperation on Chernobyl. We are also very grateful for the working visit in October of Under-Secretary-General Sergio Vieira de Mello, the United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl, to the irradiated areas of Belarus. A meeting of the Quadripartite Committee for Coordination on Chernobyl was held on 18 November in New York under the auspices of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We sincerely hope that this meeting will allow us to find new means and mechanisms for mobilizing the resources and efforts of the international community to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

Our delegation notes with special appreciation the work of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations Children's Fund and many other international intergovernmental organizations to provide humanitarian and technical assistance to the affected population of the Republic of Belarus. Given the lack of financial resources, these organizations have made great efforts to implement priority programmes and projects in Belarus. Our delegation also notes with satisfaction that, as result of the joint efforts of the representatives of the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus, together with the United Nations Department of Public Information and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations website is posting updates on the post-Chernobyl situation.

In the context of the further activation of international efforts, the consistent, scientifically based planning and implementation of the United Nations programme of activities for Chernobyl are of the greatest importance. We are grateful to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for developing the Inter-Agency Programme of International Assistance to Areas Affected by the Chernobyl Disaster. At the same time, we are seriously concerned that, because of the lack of means, the implementation of this Programme has been indefinitely postponed. At a time when other United Nations humanitarian programmes are being financed at an average rate of 80 per cent, the United Nations has collected no more than 2 per cent for the implementation of international Chernobyl-related projects. It would appear that the difficulties in implementing the aforementioned Programme are connected to a lack of clear understanding by donor countries of two major aspects of the Chernobyl problem. There is a need to distinguish issues of rendering assistance to the populations of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia affected by the disaster from the problem of ensuring radioactive security for the working remnant of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, including the problem of a sarcophagus over its fourth reactor. We are convinced that post-Chernobyl international cooperation must be carried out in a balanced manner and be based on universal human values and the principles of partnership. It should also be aimed at the implementation of fundamental human rights, including the right to life.

We must not allow the Inter-Agency Programme to suffer the fate of the United Nations Joint Plan of international cooperation to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, which was drawn up but never implemented. Moreover, we believe that the successful implementation of the Inter-Agency Programme would undoubtedly further strengthen the international authority of the United Nations. The convening as soon as possible of a special international meeting on financial support for international Chernobyl-related projects could help solve these problems.

We are convinced that the United Nations can and should play a special role in preparing such a meeting. The forthcoming fifteenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster could be the logical moment to convene such an international forum. By that date, it should be possible to undertake other major activities to promote further international cooperation to resolve post-Chernobyl problems. These could include the convening under United Nations auspices of an international symposium on the entire range of problems in cooperation on Chernobyl; analytical interviews, to include appraisals of the current situation and its prospects, of high-ranking

officials of the United Nations and organizations of the system by leading members of the mass media; the annual holding by the United Nations Secretariat on 26 April, the day commemorating the victims of the Chernobyl disaster, of thematic events dedicated to international cooperation on assistance to the Governments affected.

Taking into account the complexity and scale of the problems connected to the Chernobyl disaster, the delegation of the Republic of Belarus has the honour to introduce, on behalf of the States sponsors, the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.22, entitled "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster". I wish to note that, since the initial publication of the draft resolution, China, Georgia, India, Latvia and Lithuania have become sponsors. The sponsors have tried to elaborate and submit for consideration by the General Assembly a comprehensive text that reflects in a balanced manner all the key aspects of the Chernobyl problem and is based on an appraisal of the development of international cooperation in this field in recent years. We hope that, as in previous years, the General Assembly will adopt this draft resolution by consensus.

The President: I call on the representative of Nicaragua to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.29.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we wish through you, Sir, to thank the Secretary-General for his reports contained in documents A/54/350, entitled "International assistance to and cooperation with the Alliance for Sustainable Development of Central America", and A/54/130/Rev.1, entitled "Collaborative efforts to assist Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama and progress made with the relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts of the affected countries". These draft resolutions reflect the situation in Central America over the past two years with regard to the progress of and obstacles to the efforts of the peoples and Governments of the region with respect to international cooperation to achieve the objectives of the Alliance for Sustainable Development and to consolidate peace, freedom and democracy in the region.

Mr. Hasan (Iraq), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In the period that has elapsed since this item was last considered, since the fifty-second session of the General Assembly in 1997 until now, important events have occurred in the Central American region which have been the subject of attention of the international community because of their impact on the process of peace-building, democracy and sustainable development.

Having overcome this stage of confrontation and armed conflicts in Central America, and in compliance with the Esquipulas II Agreements and its supplement, the special economic cooperation plan for Central America, whose purpose was to help overcome the structural problems which led to the crisis, the peoples and Governments of the region, with the support of the United Nations system and the donor community, including international financial bodies, as well as the international community as a whole, have taken action in order to establish and implement a new regional development programme called the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America, on the basis of previously established priorities in the political, social and ecological spheres whose resolution is vital to achieve more just and equitable societies and to avoid causes of tension and conflict.

As other speakers have stated at this General Assembly, the Central American countries have made substantive progress in the areas of politics, democratization, respect for human rights and improvement in the standard of living of their peoples. However, we must acknowledge that with regard to sustainable development, we face an enormous challenge and a great responsibility so that our societies, particularly the more vulnerable sectors, can live in a more dignified and just environment, free of poverty. As in any other process, progress in Central America has been threatened by the consequences of armed conflict, particularly the escalation of acts of violence and criminal activity which brings to mind the existence of a real crisis with regard to public safety, as well as by limitations and obstacles to overcoming structural problems.

In addition to this situation, there has been the destruction and the subsequent effects caused by hurricane Mitch in 1998, the worst natural disaster of that region during this century. It caused the loss of a great number of lives, harm to the economy, to business, to the environment and to the infrastructure of the countries of the region and caused the diversion of resources to overcome the situation. This has led to a greater deterioration in the serious socio-economic situation of Central American countries, particularly in Honduras and Nicaragua.

Allow me to pause to reaffirm our deepest appreciation to the international community, particularly the friendly countries, to the donor community, to the organs of the United Nations system and to international financial organs for their prompt response to the appeals of Central American Governments requesting emergency assistance and for providing assistance in developing a rehabilitation and reconstruction programme.

We the Central Americans are aware of our weaknesses and our limitations, but as we are the parties directly responsible we face these complex problems as seriously as possible. For this we are developing our best efforts with individuals and groups of civil society to ensure their participation in the decisions that affect their future and that promote economic growth and sustainable development of the region. Therefore we hope to continue to have the solidarity and the support of the United Nations system, as well as of international financial organizations and the donor community, especially those that pledged their commitment in the Stockholm Declaration, as their invaluable assistance is vital in order to overcome the structural problems underlying the effects of natural disasters.

Allow me, on behalf of the cosponsors, to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.29 under agenda item 20. In the first preambular paragraph there is mention of the various resolutions adopted earlier by the General Assembly on this item. Later on the important progress made in the region is acknowledged, as are the importance and effectiveness of the commitments reached at the presidential summits, whose purpose was the promotion of the objectives of peace, stability and sustainable human development.

Reference is made to the disasters caused by hurricane Mitch and to the vulnerability of the countries of the region, as well as to the efforts of solidarity and support of the international community, in particular the Stockholm Declaration, to overcome the effects of natural disasters.

Note is taken of the efforts made by the region itself through the adoption of the Quinquennium for the Reduction of Vulnerability to and the Impact of Natural Disasters in Central America and of the consent for the strategic framework for the reduction of vulnerability to and the impact of natural disasters in Central America, given by the Presidents of the region in the Guatemala Declaration of 19 October 1999.

The effective contribution of the organisms of the United Nations system and other international organisms is recognized, as is that of non-governmental organizations, the importance of political dialogue between the European Union and Central America and the initiatives of the Group of Three and the Group of Twenty-four in carrying out the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America.

In the operative part, the draft resolution takes note with satisfaction of the reports of the Secretary-General. The importance of supporting the efforts of Central American countries is emphasized in implementing the strategic framework for the reduction of vulnerability to and the impact of natural disasters in Central America. The importance of cooperation and international economic, financial and technical assistance is highlighted.

The draft resolution recognizes the importance of studies carried out by the United Nations Development Programme and other associated groups in preparation for the forthcoming meeting of the Consultative Group of the World Bank on the regional aspects of the reconstruction and transformation of Central America, to be hosted by the Spanish Government in the year 2000 in Madrid, which seeks to establish new relations of cooperation in the objectives of the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America.

The consolidation of the Meso American Biological Corridor is also highlighted, and the decision of the Central American Governments to focus their efforts on the implementation of programmes with strategies to achieve sustainable human development in previously determined priority areas is supported.

As consultations are still being held, it would be appreciated if action on this item were not taken today.

Mr. Kahiluoto (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union on agenda item 20. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area, Liechtenstein — align themselves with this statement.

Let me, first and foremost, register our deep concern at the continued occurrence of armed conflicts and natural disasters and the human suffering which these

crises continue to cause. We would like to express our sympathy for the victims of these crises, most of which have struck developing countries and have added considerably to the existing social and economic difficulties. We reaffirm our commitment to help alleviate such suffering and to assist in the recovery and rehabilitation of these societies, while at the same time urging Governments and other parties involved in armed conflict to make every possible effort to end the violence.

The European Union attaches great importance to the humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council, where issues of the coordination of humanitarian assistance can be addressed in a comprehensive manner. We welcome the outcome of the second humanitarian segment and appreciate the work done by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to translate the agreed conclusions into operational guidelines. Bearing in mind the emphasis in the agreed conclusions on measures to ensure a smooth transition from relief to development, it should be ensured that all humanitarian, as well as development, actors are engaged in the implementation of these conclusions. It is equally important that Governments fulfil the commitments undertaken in the agreed conclusions. The European Union is prepared to work closely with other Member States and the Secretariat to ensure that the conclusions are fully implemented.

This year, as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the one hundredth anniversary of the Hague Conventions, armed conflicts in many parts of the world, including the Great Lakes region, Angola, Sierra Leone, East Timor, the Balkans and Caucasia, have given rise to frequent and flagrant violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Civilians have become deliberate targets of combatants in a world where internal conflicts have become increasingly prevalent. The two open debates held in the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and Security Council resolution 1265 (1999) on this subject have been important steps in highlighting the issue and the need for political will and action in the search for solutions to complement humanitarian efforts in complex emergencies.

The European Union would like to welcome the efforts of the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to further improve their joint planning for enhancing humanitarian response in order to create an environment which is more secure for humanitarian action. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the initiative to develop principles of engagement and ground rules in humanitarian operations for Governments, non-State actors and humanitarian organizations; the efforts to create humanitarian space and days of tranquillity to facilitate the distribution of aid to needy populations; and advocacy with the Security Council. Important strides have been made in highlighting the critical importance of access by humanitarian personnel to civilians, and we urge all Governments and other parties to respect the non-political, impartial and neutral nature of humanitarian work.

In his annual report on the work of the Organization, the Secretary-General called for a transition from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention. In many cases, human rights violations are a major cause of armed conflict. We thus welcome the efforts by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to give further attention to the relationship between humanitarian action and human rights, notably the establishment of the reference group on humanitarian action and human rights. The recent OCHA publication on guidelines on international humanitarian law and human rights law for humanitarian coordinators is to be welcomed, as is the finalization by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights of a basic manual on human rights for United Nations field personnel, and the development by the United Nations Children's Fund of best field practices in emergency situations.

The European Union regards these developments as a useful and practical mechanism by which to give effect to the Secretary-General's programme of reform, which recognized the need to integrate human rights into the broad range of the Organization's activities. The programme of reform further recognized the need to bring together political, humanitarian, development and human rights actors. In this context, we acknowledge the role of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs in enhancing interaction and complementarity on issues that have strong security, peacekeeping, and political implications.

The European Union would like to express deep concern at the increasing number of threats and attacks on humanitarian personnel in the field. This seriously hinders the ability and effectiveness of the Organization in providing protection and assistance to civilians. Without safe and secure access for humanitarian personnel, the suffering of civilians and vulnerable populations can only increase. We would like to stress

the responsibility under international law of Governments and parties to conflicts to ensure safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel to populations at risk.

The European Union welcomes the recognition in recent months by the Secretary-General and the Security Council of the need for urgent measures to enhance the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. Following the recent murders of staff members in Somalia and Pristina, the assassination of two officials in Burundi and the taking of hostages in Georgia, in early November 1999 the Administrative Committee on Coordination adopted a decision calling for a comprehensive approach to security matters and listing a number of recommendations.

It is of paramount importance that the General Assembly add its voice to these calls. With this in mind, the European Union is again this year sponsoring a draft resolution on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and the protection of United Nations personnel. We hope that the negotiations will result in a strong text reflecting the sense of urgency with regard to measures needed to enhance the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

A major concern is that the response to various incidents by the host Governments to various incidents has often been inadequate. The United Nations must insist that concerned Governments conduct vigorous investigations into all security incidents involving United Nations-system personnel. The European Union considers it vital that those who incite and perpetrate acts against humanitarian personnel be held accountable both by Governments and by the international community. We welcome the entry into force of the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, as well as the designation of attacks against humanitarian or peacekeeping personnel as war crimes by the Statute of the International Criminal Court. The implementation of the 1994 Convention should be strengthened through increasing the number of ratifications. In this respect, expanding the scope of the Convention, *inter alia*, to locally recruited staff merits serious consideration.

While in the recent past the United Nations has taken a number of steps to enhance the security and safety of United Nations-system personnel, such efforts need to be intensified. We acknowledge that in part, the limited availability of resources for enhancing the security arrangements sets restrictions on those endeavours. In this respect, we recognize the need to strengthen the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator in order to enable the system to respond adequately to all security incidents. Greater involvement of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the humanitarian agencies involved in field operations would also be beneficial.

We welcome the addendum on safety and security to the Secretary-General's report on this agenda item, although we would have preferred a full report on this important issue. We therefore hope that by May 2000 the Secretary-General will issue a comprehensive report to the General Assembly to facilitate a timely response to the need to enhance the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

Natural disasters have affected many parts of the world on an unprecedented scale. One of the most powerful earthquakes of this century struck the north-west region of Turkey in August this year, followed by another in the north of Athens. Last week we received distressing news of yet another earthquake in Turkey. The European Union welcomes the joint initiative of those two countries to make available a Standby Disaster Response Unit to reinforce the existing capacities of the United Nations system to respond to emergencies in a timely manner.

The Secretary-General's annual report on the work of the Organization highlights some alarming trends. Ninety percent of the victims of natural disasters live in developing countries, where poverty and population pressures force growing numbers of people to live in disaster-prone areas. The report also notes that today's disasters are sometimes man-made, and human action or inaction exacerbates virtually all of them.

Natural disasters need to be addressed in a comprehensive way, with emphasis on pre-disaster measures, early warning and prevention. It is equally important to adopt a holistic approach to disaster response, whereby the needs of recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation are addressed at the early stages of an emergency. Disaster reduction components need to be integrated into the recovery process and future development planning. The European Union welcomes the efforts by the United Nations system to improve disaster preparedness through strengthening the response mechanisms and supporting national Governments of disaster-prone countries. The early deployment of United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams in many disaster areas has proved to be essential.

Although the donor response to natural disasters increased by 300 per cent between 1997 and 1998, the European Union acknowledges the need for immediate availability of resources for life-saving and life-sustaining assistance to survivors of natural disasters.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, and the staff of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their remarkable work during the first years of the existence of the Office, and to welcome Ms. Carolyn McAskie, Acting Emergency Relief Coordinator. I would also like to commend the work done by the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to enhance coordination at the field level and to formulate harmonized policy. The broad composition of the Committee, comprising not only United Nations agencies with humanitarian mandates, but also the Red Cross Movement, the World Bank and three non-governmental organization consortia is a key to ensuring a coherent response to emergencies.

Effective coordination at the field level between all actors is a major challenge. The European Union welcomes the strategic framework concept, which seeks to ensure a coherent response to complex emergencies by addressing relief, political and development aspects in an integrated manner and by enhancing complementarities and synergies between the various actors. Protection of civilians and humanitarian workers should be key elements of such frameworks.

So far, the strategic framework concept has been applied only in Afghanistan. The European Union welcomes the announcement on the launching of a strategic framework for Sierra Leone and believes that the framework should be implemented as a matter of urgency. The European Union encourages the further development of the strategic framework concept and its application in other cases of complex emergencies. In this context, principled programming should be applied to guarantee consistency, as well as to ensure that these principles are respected.

Cooperation between the various coordinators at the field level is also of vital importance. The United Nations system alone may involve triple coordination in a single country: one humanitarian coordinator, one resident coordinator and one political special representative of the Secretary-General. Each coordinator must share a common understanding of the goals of the United Nations operations in that country and conform to his or her role with regard to other coordinators so that the best possible synergy can be obtained.

The consolidated appeals process has proved to be crucial for inter-agency coordination, as well as for donor response. An important function of the consolidated appeals is that, together with the advocacy efforts made by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, they remind the donor community of the so-called forgotten crises. The European Union welcomes the initiative to designate 23 November as "world humanitarian day", during which the consolidated appeals will be officially introduced.

While the donor response to the appeals made by the OCHA has improved, the European Union remains concerned at the insufficient level of funding received by OCHA from the regular budget, in particular the uneven balance between regular budget posts and those funded from extra-budgetary sources. The Union therefore welcomes the measures set out in the proposed regular budget for the biennium 2000-2001 to improve this balance.

The provision of humanitarian assistance is a priority commitment for the European Union, which already contributes the largest share of humanitarian assistance, both bilaterally and multilaterally. We have for a long time been an active partner of humanitarian and other international organizations that lead the work in crisis areas. We shall continue to assist in every way possible the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies, and we continue to look for ways that our own performance and interaction with operative organizations can be further improved.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): As we stand at the doorstep of the third millennium, it is appropriate for the Assembly to reflect on how the international community can most effectively provide humanitarian assistance. Humanity is a value shared by all the peoples of the world, whatever their history or cultural heritage. This year we observed the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, which were formulated to ensure that even in the course of armed conflict, humankind would adhere to certain laws based upon humanity. But as this century tarnished with conflict from one end to the other draws to a close, the daily toll of death and suffering shames us into further deliberation on the subject.

One cannot underestimate the relevance of humanitarian activities, not only for facilitating the resolution of conflicts, but also for achieving post-conflict

stability and reconstruction. The question of what actions should be taken by the international community with regard to humanity was a key focus of the address by the Secretary-General at the beginning of this session of the General Assembly. In this connection, effective coordination among the various efforts in humanitarian assistance is of vital importance, as was most recently confirmed to the world by the situation in East Timor.

What I would like to stress here is that humanitarian assistance is not simply limited to a passive response to an emergency. We have to be vigilant and think strategically in formulating policy on effective humanitarian assistance. It is more important than ever that this policy be carried out on the basis of the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. And, through recent endeavours on the humanitarian front, some more specific lessons have been learned, among them the following.

First, civilians are increasingly becoming involved in conflicts. This has been the subject of discussions in both the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. Civilians are recruited as soldiers even as children and are targeted for attacks and displaced from their homes. Refugees, in the traditional sense of the word, are now outnumbered by the sum of other categories of displaced persons, including internally displaced persons. And we are forced to acknowledge, with a growing sense of outrage, that more humanitarian workers are being victimized than ever before.

Secondly, in terms of resources provided, there is an imbalance between headline emergencies and less eye-catching but equally grave crises. The solidarity shown by the international community in assisting the process of constructing East Timor is, we feel, to be highly commended. Japan is co-sponsoring a draft resolution on humanitarian assistance to East Timor in the hope that partners from all regions will join us in extending substantial support in the coming years.

Often, as in the case of a number of conflicts in Africa, regional initiatives for peace and development — particularly those that address the root causes of war — should be pursued. An expression in the Secretary-General's address preceding the general debate at this session is insightful: "Humanity, after all, is indivisible." (*A/54/PV.4, p. 3*)

Thirdly, it is important to bear in mind that violence recurs in a vicious circle with poverty. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs. Ogata, said in her recent address to the Third Committee,

> "the Kosovo crisis is not over, [and] some of the experiences of Kosovo can provide useful models to tackle other situations in which the gap between humanitarian and reconstruction activities is very wide".

Again, in the Secretary-General's words,

> "[t]he aftermath of war requires no less skill, no less sacrifice and no fewer resources in order to forge a lasting peace and avoid a return to violence." (*A/54/PV.4, pp. 3-4*)

In various aspects of humanitarian assistance, some positive steps have been taken in the past year.

First, debates are under way on means of strengthening legal protection for civilians. The common recognition that led mankind to draft the Geneva Conventions 50 years ago was that even war must have limits. The question now is how to stop the culture of impunity; non-State perpetrators of serious crimes have to be tried and punished. The establishment of the International Criminal Court is a major step towards that end and towards enhancing the accountability of parties to a conflict. Japan has been active in establishing and will continue to be active in effectuating the Court.

Secondly, the protection of humanitarian personnel is a burning issue on which we need to take immediate action. All those Member States that have not yet done so are urged to ratify the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. Japan supports the Secretary-General's recommendation that the General Assembly pursue the development of a protocol to the Convention that would extend the scope of legal protection to all United Nations and associated personnel. Japan also appreciates the efforts made by the United Nations Security Coordinator in this area. Japan is happy to note that the training project funded from the $1 million it extended to the Trust Fund for Security was carried out successfully.

In the Economic and Social Council last July, Ms. Bertini of the World Food Programme suggested that the Secretary-General be asked to submit a report listing all incidents in which United Nations humanitarian workers have been killed, along with the background and circumstances of each incident and the actions taken by

the relevant authorities and the United Nations in response. Japan fully supports her proposal and hopes that all Member States will recognize the seriousness of the need to take effective measures to ensure accountability and prevent any recurrence of such incidents.

Thirdly, on the issue of the gap between relief and development assistance, it is encouraging to note that the Brookings process is inducing greater awareness of the problem and promoting planning for concrete action. Japan also is pleased that the World Bank is advancing a post-conflict agenda and working more intensively with partners, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, on plans for activities in places such as Sierra Leone and Kosovo. A comprehensive approach is required to fill the gap. This approach must include such factors as protection of human rights, security, demobilization and good governance. How to bring about effective reconciliation among formerly warring parties is definitely one of the major tasks facing the world at this juncture.

Japan welcomes the agreed conclusion of the second humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council. This conclusion seeks ways to effectively deal with the gap between relief and development in post-conflict situations and in the aftermath of natural disasters. Japan commends the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for launching consolidated appeals for all complex emergencies so that donors are in a better position to respond to them. The "international humanitarian day" to be observed next week in Geneva is an excellent idea that demonstrates that OCHA is fulfilling its mandate of advocacy. It would be useful if more assessed contributions were allocated to OCHA's activities.

As was dealt with in our deliberations in the Economic and Social Council last summer, humanitarian assistance in the context of natural disasters deserves equal attention. Japan has been active in providing assistance to countries all over the world that have been devastated by hurricanes, earthquakes and floods in the past year.

I should like to take this opportunity to express my sincere condolences to all those who lost family members and friends in such disasters, including the recent one in Turkey. While natural hazards cannot be prevented, their damage can be mitigated and preventive measures are therefore important. To that end, policies must be promoted that encourage the development of structures that equip society to protect itself against natural hazards. Again, there must be ample coordination among international agencies with mandates in this area, for example, in following up effectively on the International Decade for National Disaster Reduction.

I should like before I conclude to refer to a success story within the continuing narrative of our deliberations on humanitarian assistance under this agenda item. Last year, in this Assembly, to promote an effective international response to the resolution on the rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan, Japan expressed its readiness to host a conference with UNDP in cooperation with the Government of Kazakhstan and other relevant United Nations bodies. The conference was successfully held in Tokyo in September this year and generated pledges of more than $20 million. This is an excellent example of how support can be generated through the United Nations for cooperation among countries responding to a humanitarian problem.

In conclusion, let me touch upon the question of human security as a main focus of Japan's foreign policy. By human security we mean ensuring the safety and survival of individual human beings and the protection of their dignity. The world can count on Japan to extend humanitarian assistance, both bilaterally and through the United Nations and other organizations, in the form of financial, technical and human resources cooperation, bearing in mind the goal of enhancing human security. Japan is determined to continue engaging in the international endeavours for a better millennium for mankind

Mr. Lee See-young (Republic of Korea) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to begin by expressing my delegation's deep appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations". This report faithfully reflects the ongoing efforts of the international community, under the leadership of the Secretary-General, to improve United Nations humanitarian and disaster relief assistance. In particular, my delegation appreciates the activities initiated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, under the leadership of Mr. Vieira de Mello, the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Following the end of the cold war, new perils have emerged. Refugee crises and humanitarian emergencies have erupted at a relentless pace. Throughout the world, internal and intraregional conflicts are threatening civilian

populations as never before. Particularly tragic is the targeting in armed conflict of the most vulnerable members of our society: children, women and the disadvantaged. On the threshold of the new millennium, the international community should no longer tolerate such developments and should take immediate and resolute steps to prevent such humanitarian tragedies, particularly violations of international humanitarian principles.

In recent years, the United Nations has faced tremendous challenges, including a spate of natural disasters and conflict-related emergencies and outbreaks of disease. These challenges have clearly revealed both the strengths and relative weaknesses of the Organization.

In our view, one of the ways to improve humanitarian and disaster-relief assistance lies in better coordination. It has been our long-standing practice to divide relief efforts by time-frame — long-term and short-term — as well as by function, institution, logistics and even financing. While this may appear logical on paper, it has become increasingly clear that relief efforts cannot be so neatly separated into distinct categories. Phases and functions often overlap, requiring an approach that is at once integrated and comprehensive. This overlap is not coincidental, but due rather to necessities dictated by realities on the ground. Based on this valuable experience, it follows that short-term relief assistance and long-term development aid should be combined from the start.

In our discussion of how to strengthen coordination, my delegation wishes to put forward the following points. First, to better exploit the limited resources available, there should be close collaboration between the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the other development agencies. Also, the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) should be further developed as the main tool for mobilizing resources. In this context, we welcome the launching of the joint CAP by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Secondly, to achieve better coordination in the field, the respective roles of the Humanitarian Assistance Coordinators and of the Resident Coordinators is of the utmost importance. Making their selection process more transparent will make it possible to expand recruitment among all United Nations agencies. My delegation welcomes the joint consultation involving Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Assistance Coordinators that took place in Geneva in December 1998. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme should therefore be encouraged to provide more opportunities in the future to share their experiences.

Thirdly, in the context of the United Nations reform programme, the United Nations Development Programme now has the authority and the mandate to take all measures necessary in response to natural disasters. As a result, there is increasing demand for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Development Programme to bolster their cooperation and coordination in responding to natural disasters.

Fourthly, the history of the Republic of Korea over the past 50 years has taught us that emergency assistance and long-term development are inextricably linked. Those who deal with short-term assistance must coordinate their efforts closely with those handling long-term development. Certainly, considerable progress has already been made within the United Nations on developing a more holistic and strategic approach to responding to natural disasters and complex emergencies. For this success to be sustained, however, it is imperative that member countries garner sufficient political will based on heightened international and national awareness of humanitarian principles.

In complex humanitarian emergencies, victims must have unfettered access to humanitarian assistance. The first step is to allow humanitarian aid workers to carry out their urgent tasks effectively and, above all, safely. In our view, this Assembly should carry out substantive discussions on the protection of humanitarian assistance, including the establishment of a mechanism to extend the scope of legal protection under the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

Aid workers have increasingly found themselves the target of attacks as they try courageously to alleviate suffering in conflicts that rage out of control. 1998 marked the first year in history in which more civilians than peacekeepers lost their lives in service to the United Nations. The massacre of two United Nations officials in southern Burundi and of one official of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo remind us that this trend shows no sign of abating in the near future.

In this connection, the Republic of Korea, during its presidency of the Security Council in May 1997, initiated a debate on protection for humanitarian assistance to refugees and others in conflict situations. We are pleased to note that the Security Council has pursued this policy

of holding open debates on the issue. We welcome the Secretary-General's annual report on the work of the Organization, with its central themes of facing the humanitarian challenge and building a culture of prevention.

In response to the urgent need to protect those involved in humanitarian assistance in conflict situations, and determined to contribute to international efforts in this regard, my Government has decided to co-sponsor the draft resolution before us on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel. We hope that this draft resolution will be adopted by consensus by the General Assembly.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the General Assembly of the steadfast support and commitment of the Government of Korea to the relief assistance and protection work of the United Nations and of our resolve to continue contributing to this collective endeavour.

Mr. Frigerio (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak before the General Assembly on behalf of my Government on the occasion of the consideration of sub-item (d) of agenda item 20. My delegation expresses its gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report in document A/54/217 on the "White Helmets" Initiative, which is the focus of the General Assembly's debate on this sub-item.

I also wish to express our appreciation for the continued and committed support given to this initiative by the United Nations Volunteers from Bonn and Geneva and by the United Nations Development Programme office in Buenos Aires. Finally, we are honour-bound to acknowledge the invaluable guidance provided to us at all times by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in New York and Geneva. This close relationship with OCHA portends very well for future joint activities.

As indicated in the Secretary-General's report, a few months ago United Nations Volunteers and Argentina agreed on the need for an independent and in-depth evaluation of the experience of the "White Helmets" initiative from its inception to date. The highly positive results of that evaluation were used by the Secretariat, *inter alia*, in drafting document A/54/217. Parts II, III and IV of the report are sufficiently self-explanatory so as to make it unnecessary for me to refer to them extensively. I wish to state clearly that we are in full agreement with their content, just as we have previously agreed with the findings and recommendations of the assessment mission.

It is because of the confidence gained through solid experience, confirmed through an independent assessment and reaffirmed through the expansion of institutional agreements and contacts with the World Food Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Development Bank, the European Parliament, the Organization of African Unity and the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations that I am able to state my full agreement with the views of the Secretary-General expressed in the report. Pre-identified, standby and trained teams of White Helmets are a tool available to the United Nations, through the United Nations Volunteers, to give immediate support to its relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development activities.

In this context, my Government, together with other countries, will submit a draft resolution on the "White Helmets" initiative for consideration by the General Assembly. This is a unique opportunity for my Government to reaffirm its commitment to this initiative and to express its conviction that it continues to deserve the ongoing support of all the members of the international community.

As pointed out by the Secretary-General on more than one occasion, including during his recent visit to my country, the active participation of civil society in United Nations activities is an essential prerequisite for the success of the pre- and post-disaster and pre- and post-conflict humanitarian missions. The availability of the White Helmet volunteer corps is a useful, effective and efficient tool to ensure orderly and increasing participation.

The draft resolution to be introduced contains the necessary elements to contribute to this task, assigning to the Member States, through the strengthening and expansion of an appropriate consultative mechanism, the crucial responsibility of ensuring the necessary political guidance that this additional tool of international cooperation requires. The interest shown by many Member States and sectors of civil society in the concept and composition of the White Helmets, as well as the possible emergence of similar mechanisms in other countries seeking to identify themselves as White Helmets, should lead the Secretariat to consider that the

implementation of those initiatives must respond adequately to the General Assembly's requirements.

I would not wish to conclude without expressing my Government's concern, and my own, for ensuring the safety and security of the volunteers in the field. It is unfortunate to think that those men and women who volunteer their hearts, bodies and minds to restore the well-being of a population should be the target of senseless violence. It is not enough to express our sympathy for the plight of these volunteers; it is our responsibility to clearly express our repudiation of that violence and to take the necessary precautions to avoid its repetition.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): At the end of this century that has seen man firmly take control, open up new frontiers and assert his mastery over nature through scientific and technological progress, our planet finds itself at the same time swept into great disturbances of various magnitudes and duration. Whether created by man or nature, they all have the same tragic consequence for millions of human beings: loss of life, unspeakable suffering and the destruction of goods and infrastructure.

Faced with adverse and sometimes extreme conditions whose horrors the modern media flash instantaneously into all our households, and when the response capability of countries, particularly of the developing countries, is diminished or significantly undermined, mankind suddenly seems reconciled, empathetic and unified; and from that perspective, humanitarian assistance provided by the United Nations is beneficial and of great value to stricken populations. This is why the strengthening of its coordination and cohesion, the broadening of its scope and the acceleration of its deployment are urgent and essential.

In fact, humanitarian assistance is increasingly becoming an important area of our Organization's activities. It is the subject of determined interest and sustained follow-up within the United Nations system, as well as for international public opinion. In response to the reform proposals of the Secretary-General, the Economic and Social Council has begun a well-conceived tradition of holding a humanitarian segment during its annual substantive session. Although it is still too early to try to assess an experience of only two years, we must recognize the contribution this segment is making, thanks to the exchange of views and concerted action it provides in the advancement and coordination of international cooperation to improve the Organization's capacities in the area of humanitarian assistance. Sharing the same major goals, but with a vision of greater breadth and scope, the General Assembly makes a useful, indispensable contribution to the intergovernmental debates on the subject through its consideration of this item. As a global forum, the Assembly cannot shirk this debate, particularly at a time when humanitarian assistance is a subject of growing concern.

As is highlighted in the Secretary-General's report on the issue, crises and humanitarian hotbeds continue to grow in number and complexity throughout the world, subjecting more and more individuals and populations to unspeakable suffering and wrenching misery. Faced with this distressing and disturbing situation, it can be legitimately asked whether our Organization has the capacity and means enabling it to act promptly and effectively to provide relief to the greatest possible number of victims. The Organization's capacity in the area of humanitarian assistance has definitely been improving, which must be welcomed. We have seen more cohesive, better-targeted, better-coordinated and greatly reinforced action within both the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Moreover, as is reflected in the results of the inspection undertaken by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has succeeded in making considerable progress in rationalization and reorganization, thus strengthening the Organization's capacity to intervene during new humanitarian crises and tightening its coordination with other entities of the system in the context of funds and programmes, as well as with the international community as a whole, particularly regarding the procedure for consolidated appeals.

For that procedure to be effective, however, it must take other factors into account, such as the participation of the authorities of the country involved in a disaster in formulating the appeal so that they can take real control of the needs that emerge as a result of the priorities they have established. Closer cooperation to this end among the various actors is needed to rationalize both efforts and means in such times of difficulty. Indeed, the system's response capacity continues to depend on certain factors, primarily the lack of resources — financial resources, in particular — earmarked for emergency relief, the volume of which, according to the Secretary-General, has declined by 40 per cent over the last five years.

Such situations are all the more harmful for the victims when the international community does not respond to them equally; it does not take equal interest in

the various crises that batter our world. Humanitarian assistance should be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality to alleviate suffering and to satisfy the most basic needs of individuals in distress.

From this point of view, we fully share the concern and the preoccupation expressed in the Secretary-General's report regarding the selectivity practised by the donors, which results in an unequal distribution of resources among the various humanitarian hotbeds throughout the world, including the numerous humanitarian crises in Africa. Africa also has the dubious honour of accounting for the greatest number of refugees and displaced persons and is the region of the world that suffers most seriously.

Of the $800 million requested by the Secretary-General for Africa, less than 40 per cent has been mobilized. As a result, the Secretary-General was forced last August to launch a new appeal for $500 million, and we hope this time that appeal will be fully heeded. If this trend were to persist, it would be likely to have serious consequences for the affected African populations; indeed, this could damage the courageous and determined efforts of African leaders to settle conflicts, preserve peace on the continent and reconstruct their countries. This is why we call upon the international community to commit itself more vigorously to humanitarian responses to refugees' needs in order to alleviate their suffering while they wait to go home, as well as to ensuring that peace will have a chance to become lasting, thus promoting economic recovery and development.

As the Secretary-General emphasized in his report, 1998 saw natural disasters occurring on an exceptional scale and with great frequency. With its unsurpassed costs in terms of human and financial numbers, claiming some 50,000 victims and causing economic losses exceeding $90 billion throughout the world, 1998 was an *annus horribilis*, that clearly illustrated the extreme vulnerability of developing countries to natural disasters of all types. This is even more tragic in those countries with already existing situations of humanitarian emergencies compounded by natural disasters.

Here we cannot fail to reiterate the need for more investment in disaster warning and prevention systems, as well as in the process of mitigation or alleviation of the effects of disasters. It goes without saying that there is an emphatic need to stress the integration of the dimension of prevention and reduction of natural disasters in international development strategies.

As a result of the many and varied constraints that they experience, the developing countries are still sorely lacking the means to cope effectively and promptly with disasters. This is the case for human resources, as well as for financial and technical resources; and it goes without saying that the contribution of international cooperation in these areas is not only desirable, but indispensable. Thus, the international community's efforts to provide adequate support in the long run could pay off in terms of substantially reducing assistance needs for humanitarian assistance in times of disaster. The international cooperation that exists now must continue, and it must be stepped up. For its part, Algeria is pleased to have made its modest contribution to the international effort for solidarity and cooperation in this field, and it will continue to do so to the best of its ability.

The issue of the security of humanitarian personnel is of paramount importance, because it affects a fundamental aspect of humanitarian assistance provided to countries during natural disasters or other humanitarian emergency situations. Algeria shares the serious concern that has been so broadly expressed both by the United Nations humanitarian agencies and by the international community as a whole regarding the disturbing number of victims who have paid a heavy price while serving under trying conditions, and sometimes at risk of their lives, to try to alleviate the suffering of their brothers and sisters.

From this point of view, measures to strengthen the security of humanitarian aid workers, as advocated by the Secretariat, deserve our support. These measures include creating greater awareness and better mobilization to promote respect for humanitarian rules and principles, particularly in this year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. At the same time, because of the rather numerous, complex and sensitive aspects involved, the issue needs to be appropriately considered through a comprehensive and level-headed debate in order to promote a more favourable atmosphere for humanitarian aid workers of the United Nations and its agencies, in accordance with the relevant rules and principles.

The subject of humanitarian intervention, which forced its way into our debates early in this session, has now once again raised questions and issues regarding the role of the humanitarian aspect in a world in which borders are gradually disappearing, and regarding conditions for granting humanitarian assistance to populations in need.

Algeria has dealt at length with this issue on two occasions — here in the Assembly and in the Security Council — and we would like to recall here that in no possible way can it sanction steps that, in the name of humanitarian considerations, are in fact designed to violate the sovereignty of States, respect for their independence and territorial integrity, and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States, principles consecrated in the United Nations Charter. We are all the more reluctant to do so since we have apprehensions that this right of intervention could be used by the larger countries to interfere in the affairs of the smaller ones. In the last analysis, the real objective of such actions is to impose a political order in the guise of a humanitarian order, and thus to use noble humanitarian principles for strategic or political ends.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.